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Conflict in the Cairngorms

FREE inside
Maps
from
Saxton's
1579 atlas

The Geographical magazine

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Local energy is best for North America

by John Fernie

North America need not have an energy crisis.

Although nationalistic concerns over energy security would override any concept of a common energy market, a continental energy policy makes economic and environmental sense, as John Fernie explains

During oil shortages in July 1979, potential US presidential candidates expressed the idea of an energy common market to lessen American dependence upon imported OPEC oil. The gist of their argument was that in exchange for financial and technological expertise, her two neighbours would supply the US with oil and gas; the Canadians, in turn, would supply Mexico with Candu nuclear technology to guarantee future power supplies in exchange for oil for East Canadian markets. The US plan has received lukewarm response from Mexico and Canada as the economic advantages of such a scheme would undoubtedly be undermined by political realities.

The US situation with regard to the importation of oil is urgent. Since the 'energy crisis' and President Nixon's abortive 'Project Independence', the US has become more rather than less dependent upon foreign oil. From 1973 to 1979, the oil quota system was scrapped and replaced by fees levied on imported oil. The net result was an increasing dependence on foreign oil. In 1972 - the last year of the quota system - the US imported 4,700,000 barrels a day, 29 per cent of the domestic demand. The upturn in the economy from 1975 to 1977 led to an increase in demand for oil and record imports were registered in 1977 at 8,800,000 barrels a day. Imports levelled off at 8,200,000 barrels a day until 1979 when Iranian production cuts forced US requirements down to 7,700,000 barrels a day - 43 per cent of domestic demand.

For the future, President Carter has committed the US to a quota system - a ceiling of 8,600,000 barrels a day. Meanwhile, south of the border, oil and gas have been discovered at rates that have made Mexico a major oil producer. Reserves are being constantly upgraded and in 1979 'proven' reserves were estimated at 40,000,000,000 barrels with an ultimate potential of 200,000,000,000 recoverable reserves. Production has increased from 900,000 barrels a day in 1976 to 1,500,000 barrels a day in 1979, with 400,000 barrels a day being exported to the US in 1979 to augment supplies from the Texas and Louisiana fields. US imports of Mexican oil are expected to increase by two to three times by the early-1980s; however, this will only make a minor contribution to US domestic oil consumption, which is currently 18,000,000 barrels a day.

Recent visits by President Carter and other diplomats from oil-thirsty Western countries reflect the hope that Mexican oil potential will be exploited quickly thus ensuring continuity of supplies in the event of any further disruption of supplies from the Middle East. The Mexican's inherent suspicion of foreign oil companies pre-dates expropriation in 1938, and because of her insistence on using domestic labour and technology where possible, the pace of development will be slow. In a country with a fast growing population, acute problems of rural and urban deprivation exist; the oil bonanza must therefore be carefully managed to ensure a better standard of living for all Mexicans.

Mexican oil will find its way to the US market for sound commercial reasons, but the US are likely to receive limited cooperation with their offer of technological assistance if the 'common market' proposal was implemented. Relations between the two countries have not been enhanced after Schlesinger, former US Energy Minister, cancelled plans to buy Mexican gas because of its high price when the pipeline from south-east Mexico to Texas was nearing completion. Unless the political climate improves, Mexico is more likely to seek help from Canada through the state oil company, Petro-Canada, rather than the privately owned US companies.

A net \$1,500,000,000 surplus on energy trading in 1978, with abundant reserves of coal, gas and 'unconventional' heavy oils yet to be tapped, gives Canada a promising energy future. Unfortunately,



Direct impact of man on the environment of the Cairngorm area is evident on the skiing grounds where visual amenity is most affected. (Above) summer at the Cairnwell reveals a ski-tow station surrounded by debris, litter, and eroded ground

Conflict in the Cairngorms

Policies for protection

by Adam Watson

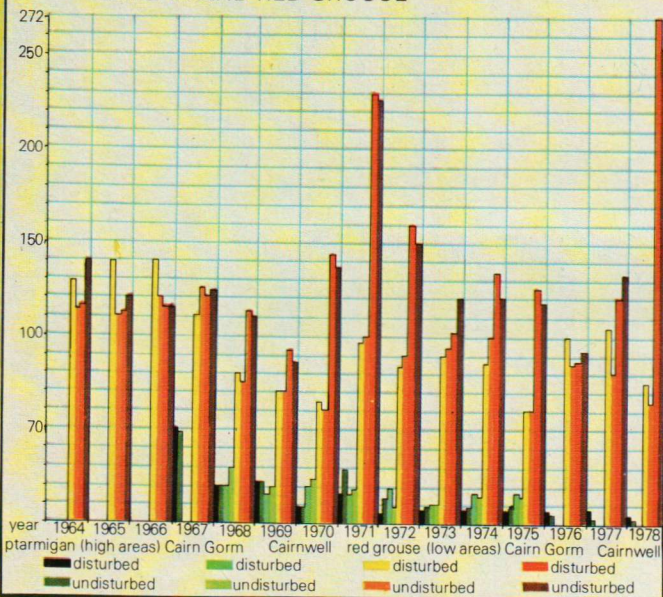
THE CAIRNGORMS ARE of national importance for tourism and recreation because of their outstanding hills, snow for skiing, valley scenery, wildlife and wilderness. These qualities can be regarded as important natural resources. Unlike non-renewable oil deposits, they will continue to contribute much, provided we look after them. This is not easy, however, because people with differing interests give different values to these resources and wish to see different resources developed, sometimes to the exclusion of others on the same land. Most of the conflicts are ecological in origin, and any solutions will have important ecological implications.

The Cairngorms are unique in Britain, as they contain the largest arctic-alpine area in the country and some of the biggest relics of semi-natural pine and birch forest in western Europe. The variety and abundance of plants and animals in these habitats, and the extent to which they are still natural and little affected by man, are also greater

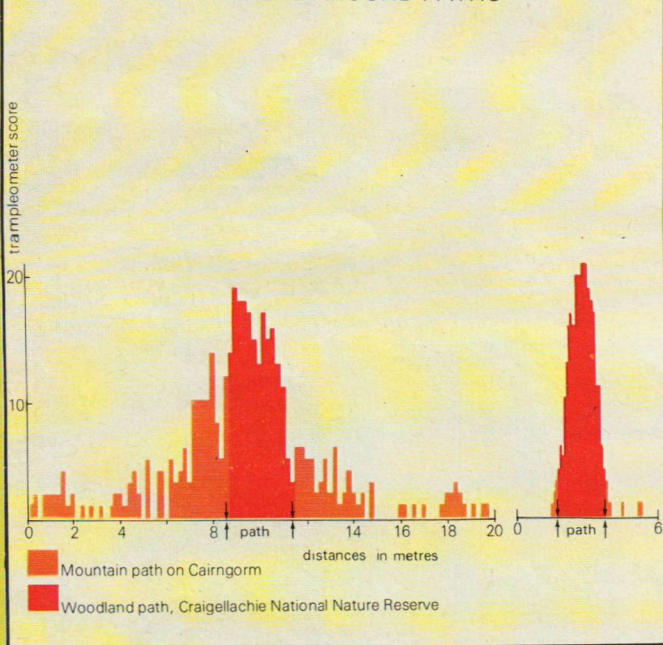
than elsewhere in Britain. The snow-patch vegetation is of special note. So are the rare species of public interest, such as osprey and snow bunting. The area holds the most varied tract of moorland in Britain, which is also important for its relatively pollution-free peregrine falcons and golden eagles.

If we think that wildlife is not just for people and that man has no moral right to eliminate species and communities, then we must try to maintain the few reasonably natural communities that are left, for their sake as well as our self-respect. Much of the area lies in the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve. In his survey for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, K. Curry-Lindahl in 1974 called this reserve the foremost conservation area of Britain, and recommended its purchase by the Nature Conservancy Council. Even so, it does not meet Categories A or B of the Council of Europe: Category A comprises 'areas under complete

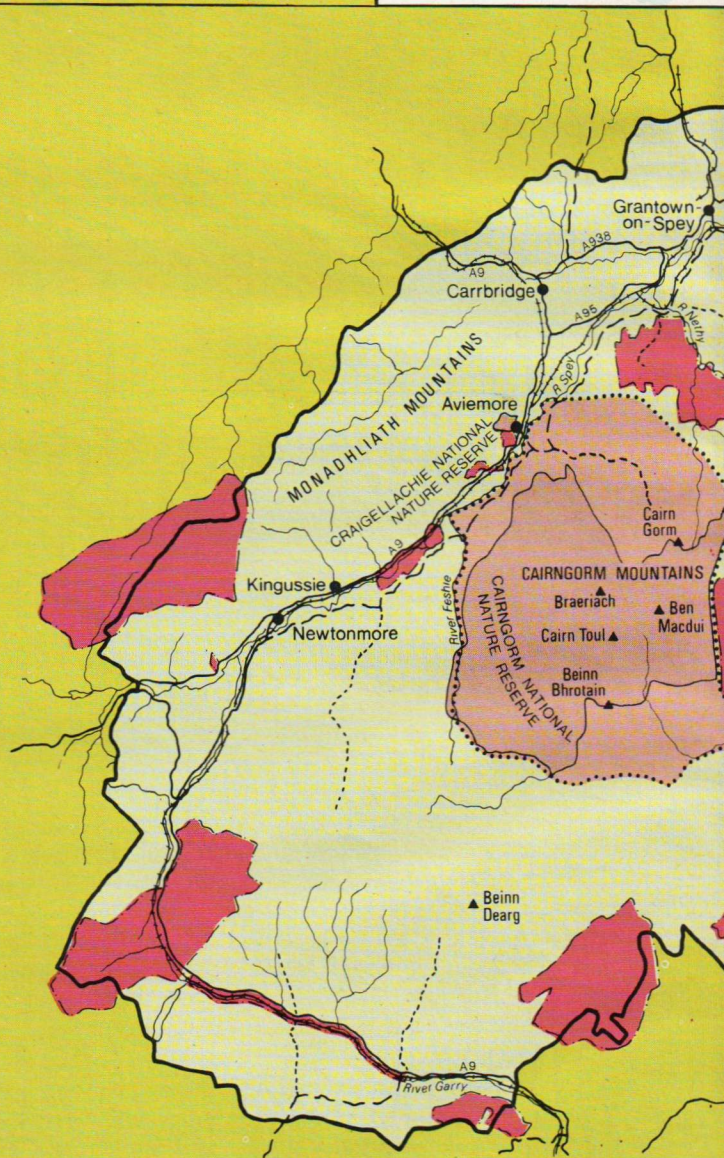
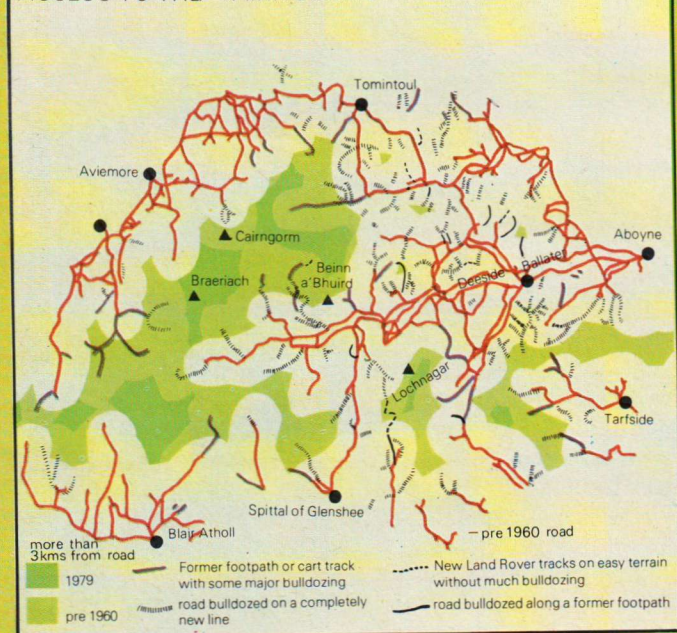
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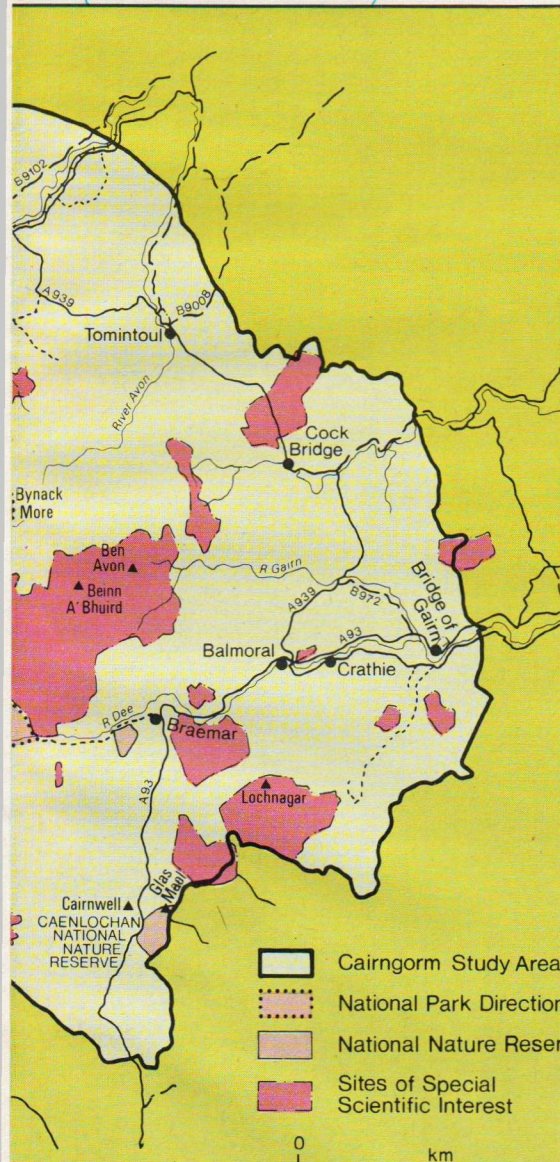
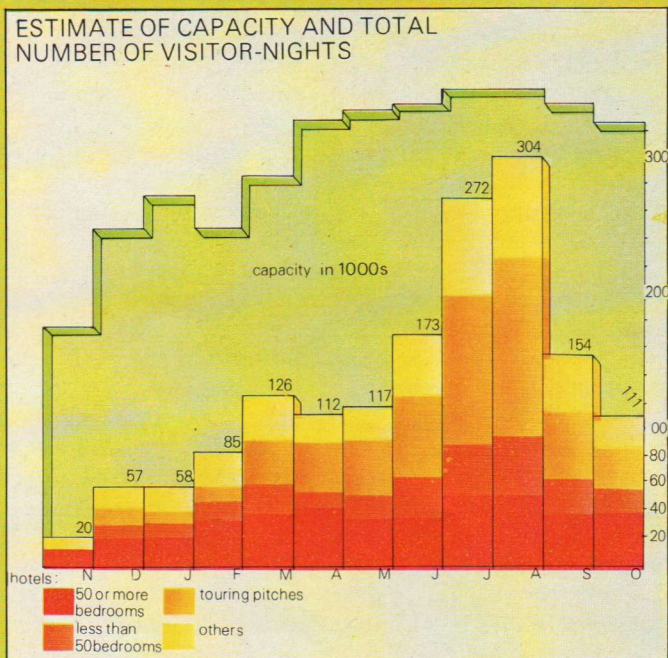
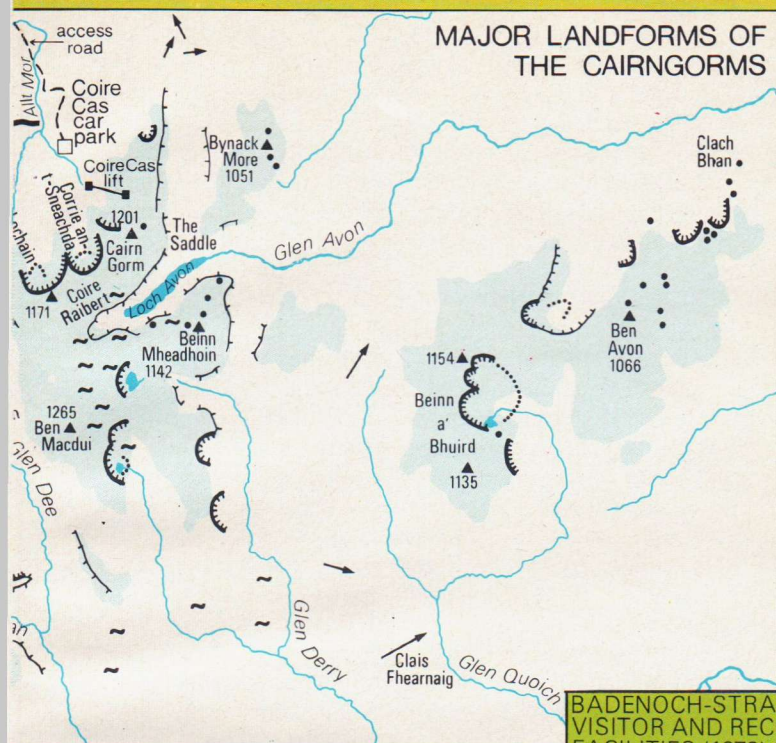


MOVEMENT OF WALKERS AROUND PATHS

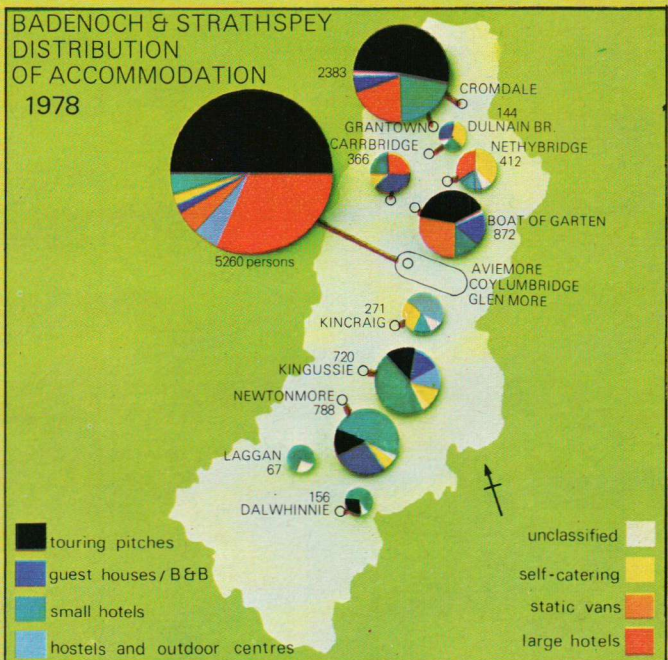
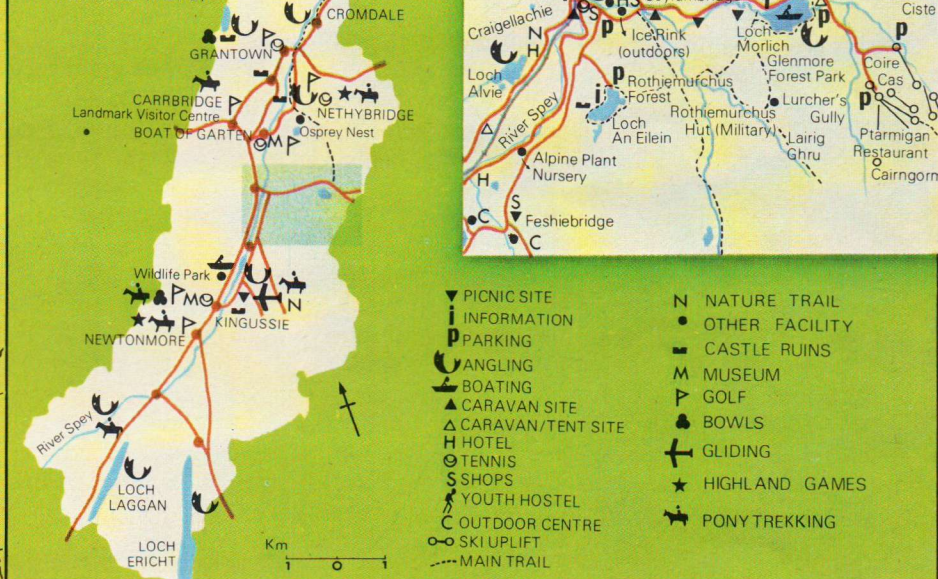


ACCESS TO THE CAIRNGORMS





BADENOCH-STRATHSPEY, VISITOR AND RECREATION FACILITIES (1978)



protection where all human activities are prohibited', and Category B areas where 'any artificial intervention which might modify their natural appearance, composition and evolution is prohibited.'

The main problem is that many tourists with conflicting requirements now threaten one another's enjoyment and the opportunities for future generations to enjoy the Cairngorms in these ways are therefore at risk. For example, litter has increased over a vast area. Tourists have caused forest fires, and have disturbed falcons and eagles by climbing their nesting cliffs. Canoeists and anglers on the Spey have conflicted in the law courts. Shooters complain that walkers scare deer. Tracks bulldozed to ease access for shooters spoil scenic views and erode soil. Food left by tourists attracts lowland crows to hills where they rob eggs of native birds. An old conflict is that red deer have prevented tree regeneration for decades, and, in the Braemar area, for centuries. Unless deer are fenced out from big areas as on Balmoral, or stocks greatly reduced as on Glen Tanar, many old woods will die, and interesting boreal plants and animals with them. Illegal killing of birds of prey in the interests of game shooting annoys naturalists. A recent conflict arose with reindeer at Cairn Gorm; many conservationists think such introductions should not be made on or near National Nature Reserves.

Proposals for new development add to existing problems. Some people propose new roads and chairlifts to provide more jobs and money, and to ease congestion on ski slopes. However, new access also creates problems. By using roads and lifts at Cairn Gorm, many walkers now go to places that most of them would not visit were it not for the easy access. Particularly under this pressure is the Ben Macdui plateau, the best part of the Cairngorms for arctic-like landscape, vegetation and animals. It is also very fragile; hilltop plants and soils suffer more damage from human feet than at low altitudes, and recover more slowly because of the severe climate.

Examples of past proposals for new development indicate the scale of the problem: a village and church on Cairn Gorm, a road through the Lairig Ghru with chairlifts on either side, a road through Glen Feshie to Braemar with chairlifts to nearby hills, an airstrip in Glen Quoich,

and a helicopter service at Aviemore which could take tourists to the hilltops. One alternative is to let events take their course. If so, public development bodies are likely to conflict with public conservation bodies. Voluntary organizations such as the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group have arisen in response to proposed developments, while other voluntary bodies favour developments. Costly planning inquiries and delays are certain. Moving from one dispute to another, with no plan for guidance, is likely to produce frustration.

If we accept that some plan is needed, how might the various interests be satisfied? Multi-purpose use of the whole area is impossible without major interests being threatened. Ecological zoning in planning is a possible solution, in conjunction with other management. Zone boundaries are often drawn subjectively, but a quantitative valuation of the resources and conflicts would allow such lines to be drawn more objectively.

How might zoning work and what other management is needed? On class I areas of high value for wildlife, scenery and wilderness, no new access facilities might be permitted, and existing ones removed. Removal of vegetation, building of cairns, and shattering of rocks by gem collectors would be banned. Rehabilitation may be needed, to prevent paths widening and eroding, remove crows, sheep and other species alien to the arctic-alpine ecosystem, and take away litter. As helicopters and snow-mobiles damage vegetation and seriously disturb mammals and birds, as well as spoil the visitor's appreciation of wilderness, they may have to be banned, except for rescuing people.

To get good regeneration of young trees in many woodlands, large areas may need to be fenced and deer driven out, or stocks reduced. Also, the woods are a degraded relic; probably the more palatable aspen, willow, holly and rowan are largely absent because they were grazed out, and not because they are typically absent from northern woodlands. Moreover, in most northern countries, subalpine scrub stretches above the tree line, mainly bushes of willow, dwarf birch, juniper and stunted conifers. This has been grazed almost out of existence in Britain, but tiny patches survive on cliffs and bogs. Future plans may consider restoring this scrub. On

Introductions of alien species are opposed in principle by conservationists because of their possible effects on native ecosystems. (Below) domesticated reindeer, a picturesque sight for tourists, were introduced to the Cairngorms by an expatriate Laplander





Recreational interests conflict in the Cairngorms. Walkers dislike the intrusive qualities of roads bulldozed into hitherto inaccessible areas (above). But the roads, which also give rise to erosion, provide access to the hills for shooting parties. Economic circumstances change the Cairngorms landscape. Depopulation has continued since the 1830s and the rise of tourism has not provided permanent settlement. (Below) deserted farmland at Braemar; dying birches cannot regenerate because of grazing by red deer





Visitors to the Cairngorms tend to come to the Glenmore area where most facilities are provided and access to hills and lochs is easiest. (Above) high summer at the Glenmore camping site. (Left) vegetation near the beach at Loch Morlich is fenced off to prevent damage by holiday-makers

Lurcher's Gully, still undisturbed although in walking distance of the Coire Cas car-park, has been earmarked for the next development of skiing in the Cairngorms. Planning policy regarding such development is, as yet, vague and conservationists fear that even more access will increase the risk of damage to the Cairngorm environment

class I moorland, there is a need to control fire. Many fires, lit by stalkers and keepers to improve grazing for red deer and red grouse, burn out wide areas at a time. This kind of burning harms other wildlife and puts soil fertility at risk.

On class II areas of less value for wildlife, scenery and wilderness, new access facilities might be allowed if these did not go too near class I areas. In woodland, some commercial management may be possible; for instance, cut individual trees, but prohibit clear-felling, exotic species, ploughing, and removal of dead trees.

Class III areas, such as the Glen More woods and Loch Morlich, would be those already so much developed as to preclude any predominance of wildlife conservation, but new houses or other buildings might be prohibited. Class

IV ground would be small areas beside existing buildings, open to new buildings under tighter planning control than usual elsewhere.

Many conservationists think that more new hotels, roads or chairlifts should not be allowed in the Cairngorms, as they would add greatly to human pressures and conflicts. For example, much public money may go into a proposed road and chairlift west of Cairn Gorm. Would it benefit the national economy more and harm conservation interests less if this money went to improve existing ski facilities at the Cairnwell, south of Braemar? Or would it do more good on some other area with no existing ski grounds and less conservation value? Those who propose new facilities at Cairn Gorm may decide this issue if they wield more power than groups elsewhere, but it would be



better if the matter could be considered more objectively and independently.

Conservation policies have been insufficient, and structures for planning were not designed for such complex problems. In 1974 the Countryside Commission for Scotland proposed a special park with a supervisory board for areas such as the Cairngorms. The majority would represent District and Regional Councils and other local interests, and the Secretary of State for Scotland would appoint a minority in view of the area's national importance. Some voluntary organizations, for example the Scottish Wildlife Trust, think this would be insufficient, as local interests could over-ride national ones. A compromise will have to be devised that satisfies all major interests and is workable in terms of clearly-defined

responsibilities.

An objective, ecologically-orientated, quantitative analysis of land use, land capability, conflicts, and policy options would be useful in the Cairngorms, and should involve the entire range of possible options. As some people complain of too many bodies with overlapping functions, and others object to the idea of a single authority, it could suggest optimum compromises given current patterns of legislation, organization, remits, and land holdings, and also given different patterns of these. Ideally, the people to do this analysis should be independent of those advocating the different conflicting policies. This could provide a rational basis for suggesting compromise policies likely to safeguard the area's natural resources for future generations.